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ABSTRACT

WOVEN (Women's Ohio Volunteer Employment Network), is directed at changing the low representation of women in decision making positions in public service. Women comprise more than a third of the work force in the State of Ohio; yet they have typically held the low level, low paying jobs. A 1973 status report on women in State government revealed that women comprised 7.3% of the 1300 employees in pay ranges 33 and above ($16,000 per year or above). The percentage dropped quickly to .3% in the pay ranges 35 and above. Representation on boards and commissions was equally low. Yet, there is a reservoir of talented women in Ohio who are able and willing to enter public service. WOVEN is forming a network of individuals and organizations to facilitate recruitment of women for career positions in government and for appointments to boards and commissions. While providing Ohio government access to qualified women, WOVEN keeps women informed of available opportunities. Another thrust is aimed at the lack of recognition given volunteer work. While volunteer activity can provide development of skills in many fields, its value is rarely recognized by employers. WOVEN is examining how this experience can be translated into job-related credit. This program, directed toward the State of Ohio, could be a precedent for other major institutional employers. (Author)

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STRENGTHENING THE FABRIC OF GOVERNMENT

A paper prepared for the program
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A description of
WOVEN
(Women's Ohio Volunteer Employment Network)

by

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STRENGTHENING THE FABRIC OF GOVERNMENT

WOVEN (Women's Ohio Volunteer Employment Network) is a research project developed under the aegis of Mershon Center at Ohio State University, a center engaged in programs of research and education in leadership and public policy. The project was initiated early in 1974 when the Center drew together a group of women from state government and a like number of faculty women to discuss their mutual concern about the small number of women in public administration in Ohio. Subsequently, a proposal was written for a project which would research the policy processes and behaviors involved together with their outcomes and consequences. This proposal was funded, late in 1974, by the Columbus Foundation, the Cleveland Foundation, the Nathan L. Dauby Charity Fund, the George Gund Foundation and Mershon Center.

The rationale for the project is as follows:

Concrete progress in equal employment opportunity for women has been made in recent years as equal rights provisions have been explicitly incorporated into government law and regulation. Much more work remains to be done in modifying the actual practices of employers. Government itself is a major employer of women, consequently the State of Ohio as employer is the focus of WOVEN. The State confronts numerous problems in the employment of women, but two related problems are of concern to us here. First, we are concerned with the establishment of a network of individual women and women's organizations throughout the State of Ohio which would facilitate the recruitment of competent women to full-time career positions and part-time appointments to boards and commissions in Ohio government. It is hoped that this network will have achieved its objectives of altering the practices and procedures of state government in the employment of women after three to five years.

The second concern of this proposal is to confront one explicit barrier to the entry of women into public service jobs and appointments on an equal basis with men. Many women have spent numerous hours, often over a period of years, in voluntary community service. This voluntary activity has often involved substantial amounts of responsibility, yet this valuable experience counts for next-to-nothing in the formal employment situation. This project will address the question of how voluntary service by women can be translated into job-related credit for full-time public service employment or appointment to part-time board and commissions. It should be clear that a successful program directed towards the State of Ohio will constitute a major advance generally in the employment of women. It will also constitute a powerful precedent for working out arrangements with other major institutional employers.

Bearing this rationale in mind we set about to develop a working plan. The first step was the recruitment of an advisory board composed of women from a wide variety of backgrounds and interests, all of whom have demonstrated leadership ability and all of whom have established credibility in their communities. They include the president of the Junior League in Cleveland, the president of the meat cutter's union in Toledo, a professor emeritus in Akron, the senior budget analyst for the State of Ohio and a columnist for the Call and Post in Cincinnati. Twenty-two women were invited to serve on this board and not one refused. This fact underscored for us the validity of the project.

In addition to giving valuable assistance in the development of the project, names of network persons in major cities and their adjoining communities are now being sent to advisory board members residing there. They will then take the responsibility for drawing together these women and others to find competent women for state government positions and to find ways of making a similar impact on city and county government and other public service boards. Other functions of the board are the promotion of the network's growth through personal letters to individuals and organization within their sphere of influence and through information to the media.

Our next step was to form the network. Members were recruited through mailing of a brochure to a select list of women and through speaking engagements before state organizations. This began June 1, 1975. Within one month we had heard from 200 women who indicated they wanted to be part of the network. In September WOVEN held a statewide conference which presented nationally known speakers and a wide variety of workshops which focused attention on the project and its objectives. By January 1, 1976, a network of 1,000 women had been recruited.

About half of the network members are women who are volunteering their time and expertise to further the objective of finding women for position openings in state government and appointment to boards and commissions. A like number have indicated they wish to enter public service.

With the help of the Academy for Contemporary problems WOVEN has developed a questionnaire which was sent to network members in February of this year. For those persons seeking positions a request for a resumé is included. The questionnaire has been developed so that it can be computerized and provides comprehensive information on fields of interest, educational background, skills acquired through work experience including volunteer activity, community involvement, mobility, economic need and political history. It also provides a data base for research on the barriers which keep women out of decision-making positions and an indication of interest in various kinds of workshops which will then be scheduled in those parts of the state where the most interest is shown.

In the area of state government job placement, a decision has been made to concentrate on middle-management positions where appointments are made at the discretion of the department director.

An interview with Mr. Tom Moyer, Assistant to the Governor, informed him of the objectives of WOVEN and its capability for serving state government. His interest was expressed by his offer to provide letters of introduction to all directors of state departments and to Mr. Roy Martin who makes recommendations to the Governor for appointments to boards and commissions.

Beginning this month all directors will be interviewed by WOVEN staff. Questions will be directed to the number of women employed, at what level, opportunities for promotion, their authority and through what procedures our candidates may be presented.

So that women can see for themselves when openings will occur, WOVEN is publishing a directory of all the boards, commissions, councils and advisory bodies of Ohio. The directory will contain information on why they were created, length of term and times of expiral, number of members and who appoints, compensation, political or geographical requirements and the present composition, male and female. No such complete directory now exists in Ohio.

As openings occur WOVEN will scan its candidates for those best suited for the position requirements. The candidate will then be called to see if she is interested in this particular position. Her resumé will then be sent to state government with a letter of recommendation. Every effort will also be made to secure additional recommendations from any other source which might influence the appointment.

In a recent study, not yet published, the International Women's Year Commission states, "During recent years more women have won elective offices, but not yet in proportion to their numbers. However, there is another avenue to adequate representation, the appointment of more women to the numerous boards and commissions which advise and set policy at all levels of government. The fact that women have yet to be found in representative numbers in important appointive positions is a challenge to all who believe in equal representation." They have also identified two factors as being most important to officials considering appointments. They are competency and representation of a constituency.

WOVEN will be monitoring upcoming appointments by keeping a calendar of vacancies which will occur within a span of several months. Network members will be notified of these opening through the WOVEN newsletter "Network News." In like manner members will be notified of unexpected vacancies occurring due to resignation or death or agencies newly created at the pleasure of the Governor or by the current session of the legislature.

In an all-out campaign to get a candidate appointed organizations might jointly recommend her, a committee could be formed to back the appointment or petitions could be circulated on her behalf.

There will be times, of course, when the perfect candidate does not emerge from the computer. There are a number of state wide organizations that have proved to be excellent training grounds for public service. Some members have been indentified with a single issue over a period of years. At this point these organizations which are a part of the network can be extremely helpful.

At the time of an election campaign network members will be reminded to question candidates about whether he or she will make appointments representative of the citizenry and on the basis of competency rather than on political patronage alone. Once elected it would be hard to renege on campaign promises especially if he or she knows 1,000 women formed into a network are not only watching but prepared to help identify women qualified for appointment.

The translation of volunteer skills into job qualifications is being influenced by numerous meetings with volunteers and volunteer coordinators in an effort to make both the volunteer and the agency using volunteers more aware of the professional aspects of volunteerism. Women are being constantly counseled in resume writing and interviewing so that they present their volunteer experience as a job qualification. Increasingly, WOVEN is receiving requests from employers who are asking for women with skills developed through volunteer service. Every effort is being made to place women in these positions. WOVEN is working with other groups to introduce, on the state level, legislation for tax credit for volunteers.

As ongoing utilization of the knowledge gained as a result of the WOVEN project, we are lending our support to efforts to form a state wide coalition of women, outside of state government, where the job/skill system now being developed may be permanently housed.

Our study has already identified, as the number one barrier experienced by women, their overwhelming lack of confidence in themselves. Therefore, we are encouraging the formation of women's centers as a means of overcoming barriers to the upward mobility of women.

In closing, we are pleased to bring to your attention the following recommendations of the Women In Power Committee of the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, 1975. These recommendations followed the testimony given in Austin, Texas by Mary Miller, Director of WOVEN, the testimony of Norma Briggs, Executive Secretary of the Wisconsin Commission on the Status of Women given in New Haven, Connecticut and the report of the Center for the American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University on Women Appointed to State Boards and Commissions.

Some of their recommendations are:

1. Governors should set as a goal for 1980 achieving equal membership of men and women on State boards and commissions.

2. Governors and other governmental executives should also designate

an officer in the appointments staff to be responsible for seeking out qualified women for appointment.

3. In States where there does not already exist an organized network of persons who can be called upon for women candidates for filling vacancies in state government, such networks should be developed.

4. Women's organizations should continue to increase efforts to secure commitments from all candidates for office.

5. Foundations should support efforts to establish women's centers and state wide networks that will develop systems to aid women seeking appointments.